

James R. Caton House
111 S. Fairfax Street
Alexandria
Virginia

HABS No. VA-668

HABS
VA
7-ALEX
153-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

JAMES R. CATON HOUSE

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7-ALEX,
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Location: 111 S. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia

Present Owner: Demolished after 1969 by the Alexandria Redevelopment Housing Authority as part of an urban renewal project in the old commercial center of Alexandria.

Statement of Significance: Built as a residence by a prominent Alexandria lawyer, this modestly-scaled late nineteenth century building exhibits interesting wood and brick detailing.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Uncertain but probably built shortly after the lot was purchased by James R. Caton and James M. Johnson in 1893.
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: James R. Caton was the first owner (with John M. Johnson). On February 3, 1893, Jeanette Bernheimer conveyed to John M. Johnson and James R. Caton, for \$1,200, a lot of ground described as:

Beginning on the west side of Fairfax Street 147 feet more or less south of King Street and at the north line of the property formerly belonging to Bedford Brown, M.D.; then,
Go north on Fairfax Street 20 feet;
West parallel to King Street 60 feet;
South parallel to Fairfax Street 20 feet;
East in a direct line 60 feet to the beginning.

On May 11, 1921, John M. Johnson and wife conveyed the same lot to James R. Caton, for \$2,375, "with the buildings and improvements thereon." It is probable that the building was erected in 1893 or shortly thereafter. Subsequent owners unknown.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

James R. Caton was one of Alexandria's leading lawyers, and served for a number of years in the Virginia House of Delegates. In 1933 Caton published (Newell-Cole Company, Inc., Alexandria), Jottings from the Annals of Alexandria, sub-titled, Legislative

Chronicles of the City of Alexandria.

The following announcement of his death appeared in the Alexandria Gazette of August 16, 1935:

James Randall Caton, one of the city's most prominent attorneys and dean of the Alexandria Bar Association died at his residence, 212 North Columbus Street, at 9:40 o'clock this morning after a brief illness which began last Saturday.

Funeral services will be held tomorrow afternoon at 5:30 o'clock from his late residence, and will be conducted by Rev. Ernest W. Aaron, pastor of the M. E. Church South, of which Mr. Caton was a member.

Pallbearers for the rites will be Judges W. P. Woolls, of the Corporation Court; Judge Walter T. McCarthy, of the Circuit Court; J. Barton Phillips, president of the Alexandria Bar Association; Richard L. Ruffner, Andrew W. Clarke, Leo P. Harlow and Stanley King. Burial will be in the Bethel Cemetery.

He is survived by Dr. W. P. Caton, of Fairfax County; Harry B. Caton, an attorney, of Braddock and J. Randall Caton, an attorney, of Belle Haven.

Mr. Caton was 84 years old and was born at Centreville, Fairfax County, Va., on February 6, 1851. He was a son of Samuel Francis Caton and Eliza Ann and moved to Alexandria with his parents when he was four years old.

He was educated at St. John's Academy, and during the war was a newsboy with The Gazette and sold papers through the Federal lines giving the soldiers the first news of events back home.

Mr. Caton became deputy clerk of the court under Jefferson Tacey and later was deputy treasurer of the City of Alexandria under the late M. B. Harlow.

He was a graduate of the National University of Washington and on his 50th anniversary of the practice of law on July 11, 1930 the local bar association held anniversary ceremonies in the corporation courtroom at which time Charles Carusi, president of the National University, conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws and the local bar association presented him with a handsome silver service.

From 1901-1912 he continuously represented the City of

Alexandria in the Virginia Legislature and following adoption of the State Constitution of 1901 was one of the commissioners to codify the laws of Virginia to conform to the constitution.

Mr. Caton also served for twenty years as one of the commissioners of the State of Virginia on uniform laws.

He was also a member of city council and also served as clerk and through his initiative in later years the present city manager form of government was adopted.

Mr. Caton was a charter member of the Virginia Bar Association and also a lifelong member of the American Bar Association of which he was one time vice president.

In the literary field Mr. Caton was author of 'Jottings from the Annals of Alexandria,' which was published in serial form in the Alexandria Gazette and later was published in book form.

He was a member of several Masonic bodies.

B. Bibliography:

Alexandria Deed Books 29, p. 221, and 73, p. 227. Articles in the Alexandria Gazette as cited.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

This slightly unsymmetrical two-story residence illustrates the use of pressed brick and incised wood detailing characteristic of the late nineteenth century. A raised basement and pseudo-mansard roof provide additional height to this building.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two stories, two bays
2. Wall construction, finish and color: Brick, common bond, interspersed with decorative pressed bricks.
3. Chimneys: One interior end chimney.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The entrance is situated to the right of two-bay building under a molded brick

segmental arch. Wooden trim beneath the arch has an incised design. The paneled, two-leaf door is topped with a simple rectangular transom.

- b. Windows and shutters: There is a single window above the entrance and double windows to the right, at the basement, first, and second floors. All have segmental arches and incised wooden trim similar to the entrance.

5. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: A mansard-fronted roof of imbricated slate crowns the building.
- b. Cornice, eaves: A simulated entablature is created by a pressed brick design.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Two circular dormer windows with louvers punctuate the mansard roof.

C. Site:

The building faces east along the west side of Fairfax Street, abutted to the south by the Brown Building (see HABS report VA-669) and to the north by a fenced lot.

Prepared by Mrs. Hugh B. Cox of
The Historic Alexandria
Foundation
August 1968
Edited by
Antoinette J. Lee
November 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken in 1968 to document the commercial and residential buildings of downtown Alexandria which were to be demolished in an urban renewal project. The project was cosponsored by the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Mrs. Hugh B. Cox was the historian and George Eisenman supplied the photographs. The material was edited and updated in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract for HABS.